

SUBJECT: American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians (ACOFP) Gun Safety Policy

SUBMITTED BY: ACOFP Board of Governors

REFERRED TO: 2019 ACOFP Congress of Delegates

RESOLUTION NO. 8

- 1 WHEREAS, gun violence claims the lives of 40,000 Americans yearly; and
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3 WHEREAS, an additional 70,000 lives are affected by nonfatal gun injuries yearly; and
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5 WHEREAS, this number continues to rise despite significant public attention; now, therefore be it
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7 RESOLVED, that the American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians (ACOFP) acknowledges gun violence
8 as a public health emergency and adopts the following position paper on gun violence.

FINAL ACTION: APPROVED as of March 21, 2019

ACOFP Policy on Gun Safety

Gun violence, mass shootings and suicides now claim the lives of nearly 40,000 Americans a year. More than 70,000 additional non-fatal shootings occur as well.

The American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians (ACOFP) recognizes and declares that gun violence has become an escalating public health issue.

ACOFP calls on local, state and federal legislators, our nation's governors and the President to consider legislation supporting the following policies.

1. The ACOFP supports lifting the restrictions and the restoration of funding for gun violence research at the CDC and NIH that can promote the development of legislation to decrease gun violence and promote gun safety. The ACOFP also supports additional research in risk factor identification and gun violence.
2. The ACOFP supports the development of evidence-based strategies and supporting educational materials to be used by physicians and health care professionals during wellness screenings for adults and children, regardless of whether patients own guns or not. Further, the ACOFP supports allowing physicians to distribute firearm safety materials in the clinical setting.
3. The ACOFP supports the improvement of the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) for firearm purchases.
4. The ACOFP supports increased funding at the federal, state and local levels for mental health services. The ACOFP believes that mental health care accessibility and funding have a critical role to play in efforts to decrease gun violence.
5. The ACOFP calls for implementation and continued funding of the March 2018 Bipartisan School Security Funding Bill, which proposed and temporarily funded evidence-based safety programs in our nation's schools. The ACOFP supports increased security on K-12 school properties, as well as institutions of higher learning.

The ACOFP endorses policies that require that education respective of gun violence be provided to students of all levels of education: elementary, middle and high school.

6. The ACOFP supports the establishment of federal laws allowing family members, intimate partners, household members, physicians, mental health providers and law enforcement personnel to petition a court for the removal of a firearm when there is a high or imminent risk for violence.
7. The ACOFP supports legislative efforts to extend the definition of domestic violence to include violence against a current or former dating partner. The ACOFP also supports firearm surrender policies with firearm purchase and possession prohibition for persons under a domestic violence restraining order or anyone convicted of domestic violence, stalking and ex parte protective orders.
8. The ACOFP supports the implementation and enforcement of a ban of bump stocks and similar devices that enable the rapid fire of ammunition; or allow a semiautomatic weapon to operate like an automatic weapon.
9. The ACOFP supports legislation requiring gun purchasers to demonstrate proficiency in the use of a firearm.

ACOFP Policy on Gun Safety Supporting Document

1. Repeal the ban by Congress that defunded conducting research on gun violence at the CDC and NIH

The ACOFP supports lifting the restrictions and the restoration of funding for gun violence research at the CDC and NIH that can develop policies to help decrease gun violence and promote gun safety.^{2,3} The ACOFP also supports additional research in risk factor identification and gun violence.

In 1996, the US House of Representatives voted to remove 2.6 billion dollars from funding the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and added language to the final appropriations bill that stated, "None of the funds made available for injury prevention and control at the CDC may be used to advocate for or promote gun control."^{4,5} Since that time, there has been no progress on decreasing gun violence in this country.^{6,7}

2. Develop evidence-based strategies physicians can use to promote gun safety and reduce firearm related accidents, including distribution of firearm safety material in the clinical setting

The ACOFP supports the development of evidence-based strategies and supporting educational materials to be used by physicians and health care professionals during wellness screenings for adults and children, regardless of whether patients own guns or not. Ideally, these materials would be used to guide and supplement discussions of safe gun practices, firearm storage, guns and mental issues, when to see the doctor, and how to identify danger signs in others.^{8,9}

3. Improve the national instant universal criminal background check system

The ACOFP supports the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS)¹⁰ for all handgun purchases and fixing the criminal background check system. According to the American Public Health Journal, eight states currently use universal background checks.¹¹ Other states that use this system have seen a decrease in suicide deaths.¹¹ In 2016, it was found that half of the suicide deaths were due to firearms.¹¹ That rate of death was found to be decreased when universal background checks and waiting periods were utilized. Evidence shows that purchases were prevented in 2017 using the NICS, therefore, using this same system for non-licensed individuals could prevent even more individuals who could misuse them from obtaining firearms.¹¹ This may prove to be beneficial in all firearm related deaths, thus making universal background checks effective.

4. Increase government funding for mental health services at federal, state and local levels

The ACOFP believes that mental health care accessibility and funding have a critical role to play in efforts to decrease gun violence. Although the vast majority of mentally ill do not engage in violence against others, there is an increase in violent behavior in those with serious illnesses like paranoid schizophrenia, bipolar disease with psychosis and depression with psychosis. This risk increases substantially when combined with substance abuse. Among the 20+ million Americans with substance abuse disorder, greater than 50 percent have a co-occurring mental illness. While this still represents a relatively small percentage of all gun violence in this country, when suicide is considered as part of the crisis, mental illness becomes the single biggest contributor to gun violence in the US.¹²

Suicide accounts for 61 percent of all gun deaths. Greater than 90 percent of suicide victims show signs of serious mental illness. The shortage of mental health care access and underfunding are a public health emergency in their own right. Only approximately 40 percent of American adult with mental illness received mental health services in the past year and only a little over 60 percent of those with serious mental illness received mental health services. Among children aged 8-15, only 50 percent of those with mental illness received mental health services.¹³

5. Advocate for increased security and government funding for security professionals on K-12 school property

The ACOFP calls for implementation and continued funding of the Stop School Violence Act of 2108.¹⁴ which proposed and temporarily funded evidence-based safety programs in our nation's schools. Among the proposed services were:

1. Training school personnel and students to prevent student violence
2. The development and operation of anonymous reporting systems for threats of school violence including mobile telephone apps, hotlines and internet websites
3. The development and operation of school threat assessment and intervention teams that include coordination with law enforcement agencies and school personnel, and specialized training of school officials in responding to mental health crises
4. Training law enforcement offices to prevent student violence against themselves and others
5. Placement of metal detectors, locks, lighting and other deterrent means in school entry and exit points
6. Acquisition and implementation of technologies for expedited notification of local law enforcement during an emergency

The ACOFP endorses policies that require the education respective of gun violence be provided to students of all levels of education: elementary, middle and high school. Likewise, recommend to institutions of higher learning that similar programs in gun safety and gun violence be provided to students at that level.

6. Recommend removing firearms from high risk individuals by allowing family members, intimate partners, household members, law enforcement, mental health providers or physicians to petition the court to remove firearms

Gun violence restraining orders (GVROs)¹⁵ allow for family members, intimate partners, household members, or law enforcement to petition the court to temporarily remove firearms and prohibit purchasing of new firearms or ammunition from high risk individuals who they have observed showing dangerous behaviors.^{16, 17}

The ACOFP supports the establishment of federal laws allowing family members, intimate partners, household members, physicians, mental health providers and law enforcement personnel to petition a court for the removal of a firearm when there is a high or imminent risk for violence.

7. Expand domestic violence to include dating partners and restrict firearm purchases from anyone under a domestic violence restraining order or anyone convicted of a misdemeanor violent crime

The ACOFP supports legislative efforts to extend the definition of domestic violence to include violence against a current or former dating partner.²¹ The ACOFP also supports the Lautenberg Amendment,²¹ but takes this legislation one step further by supporting firearm surrender policies with firearm purchase and possession prohibition for persons convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence, stalking and ex parte protective orders.^{22, 23}

8. Support federal legislation requiring all gun purchasers to complete a gun safety course or live fire exercise with a range instructor

Currently 10 states require a permit to purchase a handgun that includes a safety class. Five states require completing a safety class to purchase a long gun. Twenty-three states require live fire training with an instructor. Forty states and the District of Columbia require gun owners to complete a safety class or complete a live fire exercise with an instructor to receive a conceal carry permit. These requirements reflect the basic understanding that gun owners who are not sufficiently trained in how to use their weapon pose a danger to themselves and others.^{24, 25}

9. Implementation and enforcement of a ban on bump stocks and similar devices that allow semiautomatic weapons to operate like an automatic weapon

The ACOFP supports the ban of bump stocks and similar devices that enable the rapid fire of ammunition. On February 20, 2018, President Trump issued a memorandum to the Attorney General "to dedicate all available resources to propose for notice and comment a rule banning all devices that turn legal weapons into machine guns." On December 18, 2018, Attorney General Mathew Whitaker announced that the Department of Justice had amended the regulations of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) clarifying that bump stocks fall within the definition of machine guns under federal law. The final law will go into effect March 26, 2019. The ban will not only affect further sales of bump stocks but will make them illegal to possess as well. Current owners of bump stock devices must divest themselves as of the date of the final rule. Current possessors have the option of abandoning their device at the nearest ATF office or destroying them in such a manner that they will be incapable of being readily restored to function.²⁶

FOOTNOTES

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4. Flawed gun policy research could endanger public safety. Webster, D., et. al., *American Journal of Public Health*, June 1997, pp. 918-921. Published on-line: August 30, 2011
5. Gun Policy, Opinion, Tragedy, and Blame Attribution: The Conditional Influence of Issue Frames, Harder-Markel, D. and Joslyn, M., *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 63, Issue 2, May 2001. Pages 520-543.
6. Mental Illness, Mass Shootings, and the Politics of American Firearms, Metzler, J., and MacLead, K., *American Journal of Public Health*, 105, No. 2, February 2015; pp. 240-249.
7. Massachusetts office of the Attorney General – <http://www.massmed.org/firearmguidanceforpatients/>
8. Gun Safety - <https://familydoctor.org/gun-safety/>
9. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. <https://www.atf.gov/qa-category/national-instant-criminal-background-check-system-nics>.
10. Effects of the Repeal of Missouri’s Handgun Purchaser Licensing Law on Homicides. *Journal of Urban Health*. Vol 91, Issue 2. April 2014. Pages 293-302.
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17. The United States Department of Justice. 1117. Restrictions on the Possession of Firearms by Individuals Convicted of a Misdemeanor Crime of Domestic Violence. *Criminal Resource Manual* 1101-1199. Fall 1996. [July 2013; December 2018]. Available from <https://www.justice.gov/jm/criminal-resource-manual-1117-restrictions-possession-firearms-individuals-convicted>
18. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey’s definition of an intimate partner as “a romantic or sexual partner and includes spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, people with whom they date, were seeing, or “hooked up.”
19. Campbell, J.C., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J., Block, C., Campbell, D., Curry, M. A., Gary, F., Glass, N., McFarlane, J., Sachs, C., Sharps, P., Ulrich, Y., Wilt, S., Manganello, J., Xu, X., Schollenberger, J., Frye, V., & Lauphon, K. (2003). Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: Results from a multisite case control study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(7), 1089-1097.
20. [Everytown For Gun Safety](#)
21. *Outdoor Life: The Gun Shots*, March 27, 2013
22. The United States Department of Justice. 1117. Restrictions on the Possession of Firearms by Individuals Convicted of a Misdemeanor Crime of Domestic Violence. *Criminal Resource Manual* 1101-1199. Fall 1996. [July

2013; December 2018]. Available from <https://www.justice.gov/jm/criminal-resource-manual-1117-restrictions-possession-firearms-individuals-convicted>

23. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey's definition of an intimate partner as "a romantic or sexual partner and includes spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, people with whom they date, were seeing, or "hooked up."
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